DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 080 511 SP 006 804

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TITLE The Hidden Curriculum of Competency Based Teacher Education.
PUB DATE [72]
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Educational Innovation; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Problems; *Effective Teaching; *Performance Based Teacher Education; *Program Effectiveness; Teacher Education Curriculum; Teacher Programs

ABSTRACT

The advantages of competency-based programs may indeed outweigh the disadvantages, but it is still fitting that teacher educators be aware of the disadvantages. In competency-based education, teaching acts are given priority over principles that guide the act. If we do no more than prepare teachers to respond to specific stimuli in predictable ways, we are producing teachers who are obsolete as soon as the stimuli change. Competency-based education is cannon fodder for the educational establishment, perpetuating technical expertise rather than educational methodology that sets the mind free to question and probe. Too often the need for acquiring information demeans the individual, and while it is possible to build the individual's assimilation of his experiences into programs of competency-based teacher education, too often it is not done. More importantly, competency-based education is based on the assumptions that there is no controversy about what is important for teachers to know and do and that man needs to be manipulated by those in authority in order for him to do what he should. The cry for accountability coupled with the financial squeeze in teacher education institutions has caused educators to seek easy answers. Perhaps good teacher education programs can be defined by those easy devices it refused to accept. (JA)

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The Hidden Curriculum of Competency Based Teacher Education

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A Parable

"In a certain ancient country the crops came in and they were poisonous. Anyone who ate of them became insane. The king said "There is but one thing to do. We must eat the grain to survive, but there must be those among us who remember we are insane."

Anon.

During the past four years performance based competency has moved to center stage as an issue in the preparation of teachers. The notion has been widely accepted in concept and in fact. Competency based education has been touted as a "promise of renovating and regenerating teacher education."[1] It has also been credited with being able to accomplish this in record-setting time.[2]

The specifics of performance based competency have been carefully spelled out in professional journals and papers.[3] Essentially, and over simply stated, the advantages of a competency based program are that it produces teachers who possess specialized techniques; that they attain these techniques through a series of specifically determined managerial and instructional units, and that the level of competency attained by the prospective teacher can be carefully and accurately ascertained. That the prospective teacher can demonstrate empirically that he possesses specific skills serves to make him more accountable to the public who will eventually hire him as a teacher.

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What could be safer than this? We determine what skills a teacher needs to possess in order to be certain he will do the job for which he is hired to do; we catagorize and order these predetermined skills into instructional modules; we carefully guide each prospective teacher through the proper module depending on his previous level of competence and finally we accurately and objectively ascertain his level of success in attaining the necessary competency.

Education of a human being is seldom as simple as it seems on the surface. Questions about teaching and learning have plagued philosophers for centuries. Recently we have become aware of various concealed factors existing in teaching-learning situations; for example, we are now aware that a phenomenon referred to as the self fulling prophecy may be operant in classrooms. We are aware that the total social environment of the school is a potent force in the education of children. We are aware of the importance of the proper emotional climate in a classroom if learning is to be facilitated. We know that what is taught is not always what is learned. We are aware that body language used by teachers and students reveals much about what is really happening in the classroom. These factors, and others, may be designated as the hidden curriculums. It seems reasonable that as we prepare and implement competency based teacher education programs we may be confronting the phenomena of the hidden curriculum. What do we really teach prospective teachers when we emphasize the competency based program?

The remainder of this article will point to some of the concepts we may be unintentionally teaching prospective teachers. The advantages of the competency based programs may indeed outweigh the disadvantages but,

whether this is the case or not, it behooves teacher educators to be aware of these aspects in the hidden curriculum in competency based teacher education:

1. The teaching act rather than the principles that guide that action are of primary importance.

In effect, as teaching acts are given priority over principles that guide the act, teacher education is being deintellectualized. If we do no more than prepare teachers to respond to specific stimuli in predictable ways we are producing teachers who are obsolete as soon as the stimuli change. The most potent defense against professional obsolescense is mastering the principles, abstractions, and formula of teaching sufficient to understand and cope with change. In short, education can and should be studied as a discipline and not as narrow vocational preparation. The object of teacher education should not be primarily concerned with filling elementary and secondary school classrooms but rather with helping students of education gain a fuller understanding of the complex field of education as a legitimate area of academic pursuit. The study should help students grasp what they should know about teaching and learning and so, incidentally prepare them to be better teachers than they would have been. The role of teacher education should be to supply theory and principle which enable the candidate to understand problems and to make wise decisions.

As the complexity of education increases the premium on theory, principles, and abstractions which will enable teachers to manage large qualities of particulars in the most efficient manner will need to increase. As the number of teaching tasks grow more complex it is impossible to prepare teachers for all possible specifics.

2. A professional teacher is one who is content to merely take a place as a skilled technician in conventional public schools.

All too often teacher education has prepared teachers for schools as they are rather than for education as it might be. Competency based teacher education can easily serve to perpetuate the status quo by preparing cannonfodder for the educational establishment. As technical skills are emphasized at the expense of feelings and valuing the personhood of the prospective teacher is devalued in favor of the functionary expertise of the technician. Concern for the direction society is moving toward valuing the technical above the individual has been expressed eloquently and often in popular literature:

> "Education is becoming oriented toward the specialized end of producing technicians; and as a consequence toward the creation of individuals useful only as members of a technical group.....individuals who conform to the structure of the technical group."[4]

The demands for professional conduct can easily be translated into demands for a conservative life style and political orientation. Professionalism can become the club to enforce occupational subservience. If teacher education is reduced to a series of performing functions there is no place for students to ask the really serious questions about education and no place for teacher educators to ask "how do we educate a teacher to become a self renewing individual?"

The true task of teacher education must be to devise educational methodology in which the mind is set free to question and probe. The search for truth is to be found "by burrowing beneath the ordinary modes of perception."[5]

To paraphrase Broudy, teacher education must be a stencil to be placed on the raw experience to disclose their intelligible patterns.[6] The more technological society becomes the less valuable ad hoc instruction will be. The most practical education will indeed be the most theoretical.

3. Education is the preparation for manpower rather than for manhood.

Herbert Spenser reflected that the most important question is ".....how to live completely? And this being the great thing needful for us to learn is by consequence the great thing which education has to teach."[7]

Education is by nature maieutic. Teacher education then by definition must be concerned with bringing forth ideas and truth. It is primarily concerned with releasing human potential through understanding. Education leads to understanding. It has no more practical aim.

Competency based teacher education, by emphasizing those tasks easiest to define and place in modules, may trivialize teacher education to the point that it no longer deserves to be called education at all. A more accurate term may be teacher training or perhaps more accurately vocational training for teachers.

If teacher education is to deserve the name education it must be concerned more with developing the awareness of the artist in its students than with perfecting the skills of the technical functionary. The consequences of professional dependencey on technique have been vividly described for us:

> "The intelligentsia will no longer be a model, a conscience, or an animating intellectual spirit for the group, even in the sense of performing a critical function. They will be the servants, the most conformist imaginable, of the instruments of technique.....and education will no longer be an unpredictable and exciting adventure in human enlightenment, but an exercise in conformity and an apprenticeship to whatever gadgetry is useful in a technical world."[8]

The factory model, although logically sound in terms of sequence of subject matter and orderly progression is not psychologically sound in terms of the unfolding of human learning. The factory model is at best a useless model for education. A university and a factory have nothing in common.

4. <u>The ends of education can and should be separate from the means</u>.

In competency based teacher education designs the ends are predetermined. In fact, the objectivity of prescribed goals is one of the major advantages suggested for competency based programs. However, in real education (as compared to training) the end can never be clearly separate from the means. John Dewey has told us that the end arises and functions with the educational activity. Dewey's concept of "the end in view" serves to establish direction for the activity rather than to narrowly prescribe the destination of the activity. All human beings engage in serious learning without knowing exactly what the outcome will be. Even the most meticulous scientist works in this manner. The purpose of our educational endeavor is often known only in retrospect. Rather than to determine the precise outcome, real education seeks to give meaning to those experiences which have already occured.

John Dewey warned that "there is a strong temptation to assume that presenting subject matter in its perfected forms provides the royal road

to learning." But there is no royal road to learning. Education as a discipline is the means as well as the end. The means of education do more than affect the ends. The means become the ends.

5. Education Experiences can be prescribed in terms of precise conditions rather than based on the individual's assimilation of his own experience.

John Dewey wrote in 1897, in My Pedogogic Creed:

> "The only possible adjustment which we can give to the child under existing conditions is that which arises through putting him in complete possession of all his powers. With the advent of democracy and modern industrial conditions, it is impossible to foretell definitely just what civilization will be twenty years from now. Hence it is impossible to prepare the child for any precise set of conditions."[9]

Jacques Maritain said that "education is not animal training. The education of a man is a human awakening." Education requires two aspects: (1) the acquiring of new information, and (2) discovering personal meaning for that information. Information in itself is reduced to the level of training. Only when individuals find the link between specific information and a significance and meaning in their personal experience can education be said to occur. Most of our efforts to improve education involve new ways of delivering information to people. We neglect the aspect of helping the learner discover personal meaning for that information. Education, by definition, assumes man's unique powers of consciousness and reflection.

While it is true that it is possible to build the individual's assimilation of his experiences into programs of competency based teacher education, too often it is not done. Designing the process is so much easier than dealing with the person in the process that those most difficult tasks are neglected for the simple tasks which allow some type of closure. Real education can never assume closure for human beings who are learning and growing allow no

place for closure in their education. Education must become an "opening up" process concerned with releasing human potential.

6. The primary function of teacher education, and presumably, all education is to enhance the economic future of the individual by training him in salable skills.

The tight job market for teachers coupled with the concern for accountability have contributed to the zest with which teacher educators embrace competency based programs. It is possible that our concern that our students be able to compete in the market place may actually work against their securing an education which may enable them to compete at a far higher level of competency. Robert Hutchins has adequately described the dilemma into which much of teacher education finds itself:

> "The notion that education guarantees a brighter social and economic future for the individual is illusory; the notion that education can lead to understanding and that understanding is a good thing in itself is not."[10]

Competency based programs stress the skills needed to enhance the student's economic future in a tight job market, to the exclusion of real education born of understanding which will enable the person to cope with life at various levels.

The emphasis on job preparation regards people as instruments of production and teaches them to regard themselves as such. These same people, when they get teaching jobs, will have no alternative but to view their own teaching as the production of people for the economic system. Preparation for jobs will take precedence over preparation for living. Education must be more than vocational preparation.

Not only are narrowly prescribed competency based programs inhuman in that they regard people as instruments of production, but they are ineffective in that they are not likely to turn out good instruments of production. There is no empirical data to suggest that teachers prepared in competency based programs are better teachers than those educated in traditional programs. Alfred North Whitehead has described what may be a worthwhile goal for education at all levels:

> "To see what is general in what is particular and what is permanent in what is transitory is the aim of scientific thought.....the really profound changes is human life all have their ultimate origin knowledge pursued for its own sake."[11]

7. <u>There is no controversy about what is important for teachers to know and to do</u>.

Competency based teacher education presumes to prescribe specific skills and techniques required of all teachers. The danger of this narrow view is that the object of these activities lends itself readily to the performance of required routines without a comprehensive understanding of the principles underlying the tasks. This method of preparing teachers views teachers as interchangable parts and reduces teacher education to a sophisticated trade school. It is difficult to imagine the great teachers of antiquity subjecting themselves to competency based programs. Would a Socrates or a Jesus have profited by proceeding through the managerial modules of the competency based programs? Of course, it will be argued that we aren't dealing with Socrates and Jesus. Then perhaps we are simply striving to bring everyone up to a survival level. If everyone can achieve mediocrity then perhaps the goal of competency based education will have been achieved. After all, what could be more predictable and amenable to accountability than a teacher corp comprised of persons who had each achieved an identical level of

mediocrity? We must exercise extreme caution that in our effort to bring all teachers up to a survival level we don't inadvertently bring the potentially great teacher down to a level that is simply passable.

The most important questions of education, as well as the most important questions of mankind, are those to which there is no simple, single answer. To most questions there are multiple answers or none at all. Teacher education which neglects this notion negates the right to be called education and is instead relegated to the status of a preparing technician.

8. Man needs to be manipulated by those in authority in order for him to do what he should.

Carefully designed, predetermined goals couched in behavioral terms, implemented through narrowly prescribed modules of instruction, and evaluated by explicit assessment criteria suggest that man cannot be trusted to rely on his own devices. The hidden curriculum teaches students that man is essentially evil, or at best stupid and when left to his own devices he will cause chaos and confusion. The hidden curriculum further instructs the learner to blindly trust those in authority to design patterns for his education and presumable for his life style and political orientation.

Education which forces the individual to conform to predetermined ends in order to find a place as a producer in the economic system is education compatable with the philosophy of a totalitarian state. It is the training of a slave rather than the education of a free man.

In Summary

No teacher educator is deliberately malevolent. Pressures from politicians and the public for accountability coupled with the financial

squeeze in teacher education institutions have caused educators to seek easy answers rather than to confront difficult philosophical issues. In the quest for simple solutions to complex social problems it is understandable that an institutional mindlessness sometimes results. Perhaps a good teacher education program can be defined by those easy devices it refuses to use.

The ultimate aim of education must be to help each person develop his highest powers by making an organized and deliberate attempt to help people become intelligent. What teacher education must do is to educate the teacher to understand his total life experience and to reflect on it in such a way as to make wiser decisions than he otherwise would have.

We need to revive the ideal of the teacher-poet and the teacher-philosopher rather than to settle for the processing of the teacher-technician. Otherwise our students may be as disillusioned as the character in one of Kurt Vonnegut's novels when he cautions:

> "Beware the man who works hard to learn something, learns it and finds himself no wiser than before. He is full of murderous resentment of people who are ignorant without having come by their ignorance the hard way."[12]

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